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## Reflections on the journey: Women working for justice

While recently in the Philippines with my family during an MCC assignment, I had the privilege of working with a number of memorable women. Two of these women have written for this issue. As we began our friendships in the context of our work and worship together, I was struck by the passion and urgency with which they went about their lives. Their joy for life and commitment to

issues of justice and struggle has altered me for life. Throughout my years of working on peace and justice issues, I had not met many women like these. As I reflected on the place of doing justice in the fabric of my life and faith, I was curious to hear from other women and their experiences.

Sharon and Muriel, as you will read, know that neutrality isn't an option and that there will be pain in the pursuit of justice. Within the context of the Philippines, there isn't the luxury to hope that all will be well and that each person will be cared for. They have taught me much about what it means to stand in solidarity and how to celebrate that commitment in times of worship.

Women of North America have also inspired me. Women who dare to live alternative lifestyles and who feel passionate about their commitments. Karen talks about her commitment to justice as a "calling" that she finally answered, a calling that has set her free. Dorothy reflects on her years in the justice movement and the realization of her need for her own self-care. Sara is finding her way, a young woman of passion and enthusiasm, and knows that "inspiration and encouragement" will be a central part of that journey. Kathleen speaks out of her recent experiences in Hebron and Chiapas and knows that women are in the trenches in most of the conflicts around the world.

Most of the above women talk of being nurtured for this search for justice—mothers and other family members have been significant models along the way. My mother modeled, for me, a lifestyle of involvement in community and church that remains pressing for me today. And now, as a mother myself, I know that I need



to model the important things in life. My children, Silvie and Micah, have marched in Women's Day rallies, they have been present at late night vigils, and they have brought food to friends who have been locked behind bars for their beliefs. We are all part of making the world a more equitable and just place to be.

How do we work for peace? For some of us, that's going to be a daily struggle with the injustice that affects the people around us. It will be seeking to recognize that each person's place is important. Or guiding children through their daily squabbles. It may mean writing letters to persons in government or refusing to buy war toys. Or recycling. It means recognizing the power that we have and using it to bring God's shalom to our communities. For we are called "to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with [our] God" (Micah 6:8).

—Wendy Kroeker, compiler

**Wendy and her family (Gord Zerbe and Silvie and Micah) recently returned from an MCC assignment in the Philippines. She is focusing now on a new job as a trainer and mediator for Mediation Services (Winnipeg) and relishes time for family and friends, enjoying the outdoors and her mountain of "projects."**

  
by Dorothy A. Friesen

## Nurtured for activism

My mother says I emerged with one fist clenched and the other baby hand flailing against the hospital sheet pulled up at her knees. The nurses laughed, apparently missing my outrage at the indignity of women defying the laws of gravity, to give birth on their backs for the convenience of the doctors. You might say I was a born activist. But how that impulse got nurtured and expressed, ah, that story shifts from decade to decade.

Sunday school songs like "Jesus loves the little children," Bible stories like "David and Goliath," Mother Goose fairy tales, and Grandmother Friesen's memories from revolutionary Russia where the poor were righteous and the rich were judged, all melted into one brew in my mind's cauldron—a mixture of standing up against giants, making common cause with all the children of the world, and believing that God or a Godmother would sustain me if I was doing the right thing.

My first experience of activism was in elementary school. Images of civil rights struggles in the southern United States splattered across our television screen and engraved themselves on my mind. TV had only recently been taken off our church's sin list and so its impact was especially powerful. When our sixth-grade teacher claimed he had only one soccer ball and gave it to the boys every recess period, we girls agreed among ourselves not to cooperate until the teacher gave us a soccer ball too. During that awkward pre-adolescent age, boys didn't participate in class discussions. The teacher needed the girls. After one week of this Gandhian nonviolent resistance, he found a second ball for the girls. He also gave us a lecture about our nasty, unladylike behavior having nothing to do with his finding another ball. I looked in his face, knew he was lying and also knew we had to keep our mouths shut, go outside and play soccer. We would never get an acknowledgment that anything we had done made any difference.

Denial of effectiveness is a common tactic used from the sixth-grade soccer field to the international political scene, to discourage people from making their voices heard.

**"From Filipinos I learned there's deep joy in the struggle, and I saw how strong people can be when they band together."**



Another important encouragement for activism happened at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind., against the backdrop of the Vietnam War. I tried to fashion an adult foundation for action, struggling with the *Politics of Jesus* and what it meant for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. A six-month stint in the seminary's urban ministry program in Chicago led to antiwar marches and prayer vigils, and then welfare rights and tenant rights organizing. I learned it's one thing to show up for a street demonstration, it's another to plan and carry it out effectively. That requires the nitty-gritty thankless chores of calling people, getting out notices, raising money, typing press releases, printing leaflets, putting together mailing lists. I also saw that activism is both an art and a craft. To make a commitment to "long-term effectiveness" (my phrase for faithfulness), while at the same time honing the instincts for quick, appropriate tactics requires continued involvement and regular reflection on the work.

Presidents Johnson and Nixon, for example, claimed the antiwar demonstrations meant nothing. It was only later we discovered how much the protests affected decisions in the Oval Office.

I attended the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute in the era when females had to wear long pants to play basketball. My teammates complained of getting too hot and decided to wear shorts during practice. The principal strode into the gym and demanded we change immediately, and to my surprise, some of the team disagreed vehemently. One teacher suggested I write an article for the school newspaper. I entitled it, "The Long and Short of It" and basically reiterated my teammates' arguments. They began wearing shorts at actual games and nothing more was said about it. I realized later, we needed both my teammates' belligerent action and the newspaper article advertising their arguments to quietly blow away a regulation for which support was already waning within the Mennonite community.

I've been blessed with many teachers in a variety of settings and it certainly didn't hurt to marry another activist. My husband, Gene Stoltzfus, and I worked together on human and economic rights in the Philippines during the martial law period and then on international solidarity in the United States. From Filipinos I learned there's deep joy in the struggle, and I saw how strong people can be when they band together.

In the late '80s, I shifted my focus to domestic issues and joined a community organization in the neighborhood where we live and where the Chicago Bulls play basketball. At the time, a stadium for the Chicago Bears football team was slated for the area, meaning the demolition of half the neighborhood. After many years of meetings, marches, rallies and press conferences came the actual negotiations with the powers-that-be that resulted in an agreement that this neighborhood would be developed for the benefit of those who live here. What a tightrope walk it is, to keep our vision clear while cooperating with those we used to call the "oppressors."

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**"For the past few years, I have drawn inwards to repair this strange leaky hole in the psyche."**

**"The rule against expressing anger, combined with the unrelenting expectation of niceness, especially for women, has been a formula for disempowerment individually and stagnation organizationally."**

The banks, corporations, investors and contractors who came into the community with capital and expertise are predominantly white—white like me. As I witnessed these interactions in the predominantly African American neighborhood, I become more conscious about my own position and privileges as a white person. From that grew a work on anti-racism in the white community. I realized it was the same dynamic as our experience in the Philippines. We witnessed the hardship and struggle of Filipinos, but our real work was targeted toward our country's policies and practices that contributed to poverty there.



By midlife it's hard to escape the bitter fact that betrayal by friends is more devastating than anything an opponent can dish out. For me, that prompted a life journey re-evaluation as I experienced how difficult it was to stand up on behalf of myself. I realized the courageous farmers and workers I admired in the Philippines had to overcome the internalized feudal and cultural rules that forbade them to interrupt smooth interpersonal relationships or disrespect their "superiors." They had successfully completed a developmental step I missed. I had the ability to stand in solidarity with others for two decades, but I could not stand in solidarity with myself.

So, for the past few years, I have drawn inwards to repair this strange leaky hole in the psyche. I've been alone in my little room, dancing, writing, drawing pictures with crayons. Or walking in the woods, sitting on rocks, watching birds or paddling my canoe. Trying to find that 11-year-old who could say unapologetically, "It's not fair! We want to play soccer, too." Trying to find the teenager who disappeared under the Mennonite mix-up of equating anger with violence, conflict with chaos and power with arrogance. I have seen people, myself and others, draw back when we could have stopped an unhealthy dynamic within our own

congregation, peace organization or family by speaking up. The rule against expressing anger, combined with the unrelenting expectation of niceness, especially for women, has been a formula for disempowerment individually and stagnation organizationally.

That is why I believe my current internal work is also nurture for activism. More than ever, in the new millennium, we are in need of strong, fully formed individuals, aware and unafraid of their own power, who can come together in healthy new community configurations to work for justice and peace and savor creation.

**Dorothy is a graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (1976) with an M.A. in Peace Studies. She was the director of Church Community Services in Indiana and later the codirector with her husband, Gene Stoltzfus, of the MCC Philippines program. She then cofounded and coordinated Synapses, a Chicago-based peace and justice solidarity organization. Dorothy is the author of two books, *Critical Choices: A Journey with the Filipino People* and a romance novel entitled, *Stormy Ties*.**

**"How I wish that Protestantism,  
as taught to me, did not make  
Christianity so totally cerebral."**

by Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes

## Here I stand

I am a third-generation Protestant. A product of the American Baptist mission in the Philippines. My family had long relationships with the Baptist missionaries in our area. In fact, I was given a scholarship at the American Baptist Seminary of the West in California to earn a Masters in Religious Education. North American Protestantism has had a strong hand in molding me into the kind of person I am now.

But at age 50, after experiencing a crisis of faith which has shaken the very foundations of what I had believed in all these years, I took a serious look at the woman in me and wondered whether or not that aspect of me has been enhanced by my being a Protestant Christian.

Part of me rejoiced that I was a woman. I can celebrate my historical circumstances, which include such courageous women as Hagar, Esther and Mary to mention but a few. I can celebrate the values that my Church inculcated in me—values that have become the animating core of my life.

On the other hand . . .

- How I wish I had not been taught that the Bible is sacrosanct. Deifying the Scripture has become a major barrier for me to look beyond the biblical images and expositions so that I may find liberating themes that might move me to read the Bible with a woman's eyes.
- How I wish that I had been taught the concept of collective redemption instead of *individual* salvation. Salvation of the individual soul has concealed, if not wiped out, the feminist value of wholeness, sharing

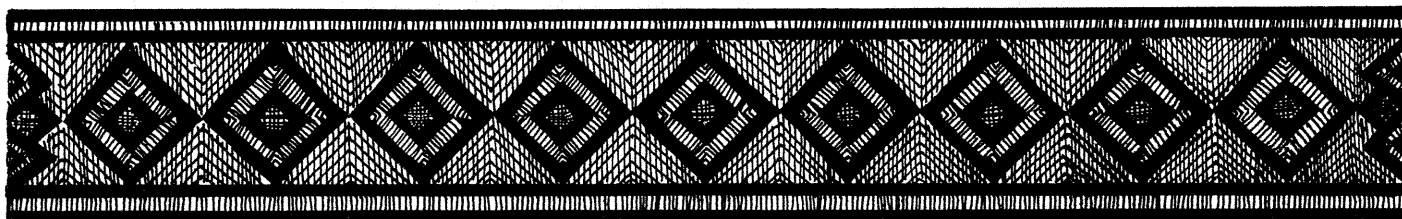
and commonality. Individualism has caused a fractious view of reality and a way of thinking which categorizes life in neat boxes. And so peace of mind or liberation or the good life is seen from an individual perspective.

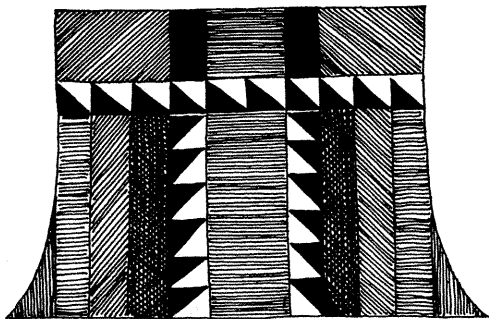
- How I wish that Protestantism, as taught to me, did not make Christianity so totally cerebral. Faith reflection, a process which begins in people's experiences and objective conditions, is anathema to Protestant Christians for we have been taught that God is out there, high and lifted up.
- How I wish I had not been taught that Christians should be above culture. This teaching has led them to take a neutral stand on issues and events. Neutrality pushes me to keep myself unstained from the jolts of society. That does nothing but allow "evil" to flourish. Keeping a neutral position and working for reconciliation only contributes to the perpetuation of the way things are. It does not prod people to change the conditions.

So here I stand—a Protestant Christian woman immersed in a suffocating situation: crying from the depths, seeking justice for the people and liberation of the Gospel from its trappings.

- I strive to move toward the fulfillment of the highest purpose for my life, fully aware of my capacity and limitations, even as I reject predetermined roles that society imposes on me.
- I question the foundation of society as it is now organized, challenging the purveyors of all oppressive and exploitative structures which cause the misery of the majority of the Filipino people, especially women.

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- Along with other women, I work to bring back wholeness in theology—making it less compartmentalized, more integrated and concretely related to daily life. I criticize the tendency of theology to become a mere academic exercise, and challenge biblical scholars and theologians to *do* theology.
- Along with other women, I push for a method of theological reflection that is done from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed.

The challenge posed by women and other oppressed classes to Protestant Christianity is to:

- discourage the detachment of God from the reality of human struggle against oppression in its concrete manifestations;
- perceive faith as a state of ultimate concern for those who are on the margins of society instead of blind acceptance of doctrines handed down by authority;
- see hope as a collective creation of a future characterized by freedom and justice instead of a passive expectation of a “heavenly” reward;
- see love as working against the unfair dichotomies, classes and structures in society instead of accepting exploitation;
- draw spiritual power from the experience of the exploited masses as it locates its solidarity with the people so that it can become more fully a partner of women, children and men in their struggle for a new and transformed society.

**Sharon Rose Joy is the general secretary for KASIMBAYAN, a church people's justice organization, the national coordinator for AWIT (Association of Women in Theology), a mother, church-person, international speaker and a tireless worker in the struggle for justice.**

by Karen Schlichting

## When to engage

I grew up very isolated from any political discussion. The closest parallel to political discussion was cheering for the Toronto Maple Leafs in a wave of anti-Leaf sentiment. They were clearly the underdog but were, in my opinion, the only team worth cheering for.

As a teen, I started to ask questions that were “political in nature” and my mother answered on a faith basis. She wasn’t afraid of my questions about homosexuality; she answered in a very open way. She was not stumped by my musings. She also told me of her own transition from believing that capital punishment was a good idea to embracing a loving, restorative model of justice. Her belief in God allowed her to understand the power of forgiveness and the need for love. I also remember her explaining that perhaps the New Democratic Party was actually “more Christian” than the other two political parties (although I’m sure she wouldn’t have shared that with too many people at the time). She had a very approachable nature. I felt no anxiety from her around the questions that I posed.

As a girl I had no idea that I would be “called” to doing justice work. Where did that come from?

After graduation from high school I began my journey into the side of life from which I had been sheltered. My work and interests led me to working with the mentally challenged community, the deaf community, and the aboriginal community, and to working on issues concerning housing, women and global economic justice.

Then there was the moment of clarity that still drives me today. About four years ago I was between jobs and was wondering in what direction I should go when I attended an ecumenical gathering of people interested in global justice issues in Toronto. During a brainstorming session, my mental/spiritual sky opened and I realized, although with some fear, that I could now do these things that had for years intimidated me. I knew that I had to work on justice issues in order to be true to what I knew had been in my bones and in my soul for a long time.

**"Social justice issues can cause people to feel guilty or overwhelmed, but for me the prospect of spending the majority of my day working on these issues caused my soul to sing."**

I can't tell you how I knew I had to do this work; I just knew. There was a feeling of freedom, a rush of fresh air, perhaps something that could be understood as the spirit of God. Social justice issues can cause people to feel guilty or overwhelmed, but for me the prospect of spending the majority of my day working on these issues caused my soul to sing.

Since that experience four years ago I have engaged myself in a wide range of issues. My employment at Project Peacemakers, a local peace and justice education group, gave me the canvas on which I could begin painting my first strokes of action. Activities that engaged my spirit ranged from organizing vigils, conferences, rallies and concerts, to meeting Canada's foreign affairs minister

to discuss Canada's role in Iraq and small weapons trade. Before I was engaged in the issues I could feel my spirit being smothered with skepticism. For me there is something profound or spiritual about engaging myself in the issue. It's about being more fully human.

Because I had filled my life with information about what is terribly wrong with the way that our world is structured, perhaps it was just a matter of time before I could no longer hold back that spirit of truth. How many voices from the margins did I need to hear before I could act? I heard many voices, including my own as a woman. Was I simply resigned to being burdened by a growing sense of guilt, anger and frustration?

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*Once you start relating to the world as an empowered human being instead of a hapless consumer drone, something remarkable happens. Your cynicism dissolves. Your interior world is suddenly vivid. You're like my cat on the prowl: alive, alert, and still a little wild.*  
—Adbusters, Autumn 1998.

There was a way in which I could put feet to my mother's words of faith. Perhaps it was her openness to hear difficult questions that was the soil that nurtured my spirit. She may have suffered without a canvas on which to act, but I have been given a different set of circumstances, a studio of space to create action for those words of faith. Guilt around class and race issues has slowly been replaced with one decision after the other to work in solidarity with those oppressed by the systems that I have come to abhor. I refuse to be part of the problem but rather place myself philosophically and even physically on the side of those who are marginalized. The guilt is gone because I no longer identify myself with the system.

*Sentiment without action is the ruin of the soul.*  
—Edward Abbey

**Karen works at Project Peacemakers, an ecumenical peace and justice education group in Winnipeg. She also works with Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba promoting the Jubilee Initiative, an education and action campaign for economic justice. Karen is married and lives in community with Aiden, her spouse; two other women and a cat named Edgar.**

by Sara Neufeld

## Living in the fight for peace

In this beautiful and youthful world of mine (as I am just barely squeaking into the status of “adult”), it would be terribly easy to look straight ahead of myself and think only of my future, of my chances of economic and social happiness, of stability. I live in a society in which my thoughts and ideas can thrive. Throughout my childhood, I have been exposed to new ideas. Now, in the last few years, I have taken this exposure and attempted to hold myself accountable to all that I have learned. It has become important for me to broaden my vision of the future beyond my own reality and to include other people and places around the world. This vision has been broadened through my work for social justice, both internationally and locally.

I attended an elementary school with kids of many different backgrounds and economic situations. I lived in an area where opportunity was not to be taken for granted. When I came of age to move to a new school, I shipped myself over to a junior high school in the inner city. Again, I was thrust into an environment where it was impossible to assume that the students came from a stable economic or family background. I took part in their annual human rights day, where speakers were brought in to discuss justice issues. I sampled the food at a festival that celebrated the school's cultural diversity. It was held every year to give the students and their families a taste of the great mosaic of culture that existed in our school. I took part in the numerous powwows that took place in our big gymnasium. I was offered a part in this diverse world in which we live. It was in these diverse environments that it was subconsciously as well as consciously ingrained in me that I lived in a world with many faces and many beliefs, all of which have validity in their own right.

These fantastic experiences were combined with the values that I had been raised on by my family and my Christian community. My family has always been a source of inspiration and encouragement. I will always be careful not to take this for granted, as I consider both inspiration and encouragement to be central in a life of action. I was given



**"To fight means to go against the grain, to rise up with the strength of the underprivileged and the deserving."**



the opportunity to question, to think and discuss, both in my family and the larger Christian community. I was greatly influenced by this freedom of thought, and as I grew older I started to develop values and beliefs of my own. It became clear to me that I could not have this awareness of the beauty of cultural diversity and then not work to promote the acceptance of it.



With age came new opportunities, and I have become involved in organizations that work for peace and justice. Last year, I got the chance to serve on the executive of Winnipeg's chapter of Amnesty International, helping to bring global awareness and action to the lives of prisoners of conscience around the world. I also got the chance to participate with the activities of Winnipeg's Project Peacemakers, again to bring awareness of justice issues. These communities serve as another sort of family to me. As an activist, one can often feel alone, because the mass society has been blinded by Western inwardness and does not give great concern to the larger world. It is both impossible and unnecessary to point fingers or lay blame as to where this blindness comes from, but it is important to recognize that it exists. Having communities that share the concern for global well-being is a blessing one should never take for granted. There is comfort and strength in numbers. The Mennonite community has been a source of this family community, encouraging me to question what is accepted and keeping me from feeling this loneliness. I know that I am a part of a larger community, so that no matter where I am, my global family follows me.

I have often reflected on what has brought me to feel the need to be an activist for humanitarian issues, and among other things, I attribute this to my concern for our times and our future. I feel quite strongly that I need to be a part of a generation that sees ourselves as a part of the global picture. As kitschy as it sounds, we really are the future, and I have come to take that quite seriously. The atrocities that so many political leaders have been allowed to get away with have got to end. To think that a man like Pinochet, who killed tens of thousands of people, and has left a legacy in Chile that will never end, has lived until today without much accusation is absurd. I want to be a part of the world which doesn't let these things happen and where justice issues are a part of every child's reality.

As a Christian, I have been taught to spread peace to everyone everywhere. I no longer feel I am adequately bringing peace to the world by watching the world pass by. Everyone of conscience plays a part in the spreading of peace, whether that be by giving someone a hug or a smile, or by becoming a part of a community which works on a more institutional peace—through fighting corporate structures, emphasizing pacifist means of political resolution, or shedding light on local and global injustices that cannot be ignored.

I was talking with a friend of mine the other day, who felt that the concept of “fighting for peace” was rather backward, as the term “fight” is pretty much the opposite of peace. I offered a new definition of “fight.” To fight means to go against the grain, to rise up with the strength of the underprivileged and the deserving. To fight is to work for what you believe in, with a passion that cannot be ignored—in short, to be an activist.

**Sara is a student at McGill University in Montreal, although home-grown in Winnipeg. She is deeply engrossed in her program of international development studies, which looks at the history, politics and other aspects of developing countries around the world. Sara attends the Mennonite Fellowship in Montreal. Outside of school and church, she sings in a choir and is involved in raising awareness and goods for victims of Hurricane Mitch in Latin America.**

  
by Muriel Oreillo-Montenegro

## **My love story: Justice work through the path of pain and anger**

My childhood days in the Philippines were spent in a small city and in the village. My father thought that it would be nice for me and my bother to experience life in a village that had no electricity, no running water and where everyone had to walk to the *centro* or the town. As a community development worker, he took us to villages where he had planning meetings with the community to put up a water pump, a school building, clinic, a marketplace or a playground. He was a storyteller. We heard about World War II and how the Japanese peeled the skin of his brother's head off before he was hanged. He told us that he had to walk miles to school or to market and had to work to get an education.

My mother did not have the stories of economic struggle since she grew up in a family who had basically enough for daily existence. She experienced hardship only when her father got sick. Her family enjoyed living in a big wooden house and good harvests from a piece of land that provided more than enough to support her family. My mother was “always” pregnant and blamed my father for these pregnancies. She refused to have a tubal ligation, though my father wanted her to. A vasectomy was unheard of at that time. In reality, she was holding out for another boy in the brood.

After giving birth to her eighth child she got a teaching job in a remote community. It was, and still is, the practice in our country for new applicants to be “thrown” out to the remote villages. She could not take a six-month-old baby with her. So, I became the surrogate mother at the age of 12. I had already needed to interrupt my schooling for one year when I was 9 to take care of the children when she went back to school. When other children of my age were playing with dolls and playhouses, I was doing the real

**"Justice work requires sacrifice in terms of setting aside one's own ambitions for the sake of the people."**

thing—feeding the baby and the children, giving them baths, cooking, cleaning the house and doing the laundry. I took all of this in stride. I had dreamed of becoming a medical doctor, but there wasn't enough support for schooling because we were poor and my father died when I was 18. I decided to work and take up agriculture. I wanted to do what my father did: work with people. I also took some courses in the seminary.

It was in seminary that I met my first boyfriend, but I lost him after only three years of friendship. It was painful, like the pain that I felt when my father died. Then I learned from his family that I was not worthy to become his partner because I was poor. It sounds like one of those soap operas running on television, right? I had a hard time accepting that rejection. The pain was now elevated to a different level. It was a pain inflicted by classism, discrimination due to my social and economic status.

That experience of pain was so powerful that it drew out, from the well within me, the energy of anger. And that time, I did not feel any guilt about being angry. This anger led me to ask questions that eventually led me to the path of compassion and justice work. These experiences of love, pain and anger emerged as important resources in the shaping of my values and new love—justice work. I began to retrieve both the stories my father told me and the experiences of suffering that I had as a child. I began to scan the pages of memory for the faces of people I knew and places I saw. These are places and faces ravaged by so much pain, disease, hunger, loneliness and exploitation. I asked more questions. I dug into the stark faces of poverty, the structures and conditions that brought it about, and class analysis. I immersed myself in the lives of the poor and the suffering and got involved with the movement that envisioned justice, freedom and the transformation of society. This I did for the reclaiming of my own humanity, for my beloved family and for my people who suffered all forms of discrimination, suffering and injustices.

Justice work cannot be romanticized. The risk is real. The risk is especially high when one cannot count on the support of the institutional church, which hardly listens to prophetic calling and is too complacent to identify itself with the poor. Justice work requires sacrifice in terms of setting aside one's own ambitions for the sake of the people.



ple. It requires a simple lifestyle because it is only through such that we practice solidarity with the deprived and give others the chance to simply live. As I became involved with the health sector, the urban poor, the broad-based consumers' movement and the church sector, the issue of my gender came up. To be a woman in justice work

**"Can't the principles of justice, participatory decision-making and liberation be practiced in the home?"**

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means exposing oneself to a risk greater than a man. A woman is vulnerable to gender-specific abuse—sexual abuse and harassment. But then, little by little, I saw that this risk could not only happen in the camp of the “enemy.” It could happen and has happened within the camp of the comrades. Even in homes—ordinary homes. And yes, even in the safe sanctuary of the church.

As the movement that became the vehicle of my love for freedom suffered some setbacks from the blows of the times, and was busy realigning and rectifying errors of the past, I had the chance to look into the situation of women. Once again, I reviewed images of women—

women going to work or meetings and rallies with children tagging along. Why are men freer to move around or leave the house when they want to? Why is it that women are made to sacrifice more for family and children? Why do most men usually make decisions on their own and get away without consulting women? Can't the principles of justice, participatory decision-making and liberation be practiced in the home? I discovered that the home is one space that was overlooked as a place where justice work should be done. This came after a painful struggle within my own home; when I realized that even my friend and comrade, my husband, was unconsciously oppressing me through his patriarchal ways. I had to struggle hard and put him before the mirror so that he would see the face of patriarchy. That struggle, though very painful, paved the way for liberating the children and us.

As I went through all this, space for struggle seemed to widen. But I have discovered that the place where the struggle for justice has to be waged is

in the church, including my new workplace, the seminary. Patriarchy has a strong grip on the church and seminary. My experiences of pain in these spaces gave birth to anger. And such anger always led me to the work of love, of making right what is wrong, of speaking out what is not fair, of making straight the crooked. I decided to reread the Scriptures. I consciously used the hermeneutical tool of suspicion to evaluate the theological claims made by the male persons around me. It is no wonder that in the larger society, women not only suffer from poverty and hunger brought about by a devastated economic and political situation gripped by the sharp claws of neocolonialism and globalization, but they also carry another load of suffering because of sexism in a patriarchal culture. The struggle for justice and peace must be waged not only against feudalism or bureaucrat-capitalism, neocolonialism and all forms of domination, but it must be equally waged against patriarchy and

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**"I remember thinking that even though I was at the center of this hypothetical situation, I might as well have not been in the room."**

sexism. I have learned from experience that any movement struggling for transformation will not be whole unless the issues of patriarchy, sexism and xenophobia are also addressed.

The struggle for justice, in a woman's life, can certainly be a lonely path. There were points in my life when I said, "I'm giving up." Giving up my marriage, the church and the seminary. I was just tired of struggling all of my life. But somehow, giving up was also painful when I saw the faces of my children and the faces of the poor women's children in the mountains and in the slums. They became my inspiration.

Because of that inspiration I dare to hope. Resignation should not have the last word. The Scriptures inspire me to hold on to hope. My rereading has helped me see the liberating elements that need to be lifted up. Preachers and teachers generally avoid texts that show us the feminine images of God. These texts inspired me to look into the possibility of doing theology, even if I was not trained to do it and even though I was told that it was too difficult a path for women to take. I dared to venture into that path. The context from which I draw inspiration and hope is AWIT (Association of Women in Theology). Though a fledgling group, this group of women in the church—seminary-trained and not, sinners and saints, gather to share their journeys of faith, stories of their loves and joys, fears and victories, pain and anger. *Awit* is a Cebuano-Visayan word for "song," and AWIT is an allusion to Mary's song, the *Magnificat*. As we gather, we paint our dreams together. We dance and sing together, celebrating life and experiencing the warm embrace of the Spirit, glimpsing wisdom from God, *Sophia*, She Who Is.

Life for me is a struggle. It is always a struggle for justice. And I have made a resolve: the struggle must go on as long as there is life. For it is what makes me, you, us, human. I rest in God's call and promise: "Take courage . . . Work for I am with you . . . My Spirit abides among you, fear not" (Haggai 2:4).

Muriel is a mother and lover of life. She worked as pastor and spent 13 years with the urban poor before joining the faculty of Silliman University Divinity School in 1994. A member of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines and Association of Women in Theology, she is studying at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

by Kathleen Kern

## Women, men and nonviolent resistance

When I was in college, I participated in a radio debate on the issue of pacifism. Phil and I, members of the Bluffton College Peace Club, took on Greg, a Bluffton student who enthusiastically supported the U.S. military.

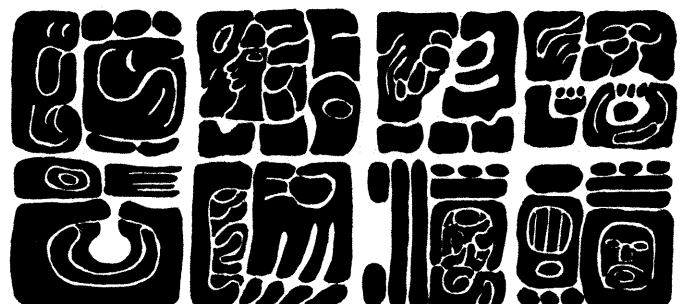
At one point in the conversation, after Phil had cited the biblical principles that undergird pacifist theology, Greg said, "But what if someone were trying to rape Kathy? I know that I would want to try and save her."

Phil replied that since he knew of my commitment to nonviolence, he would not use violence to stop my rapist. Greg insisted that he would take all measures possible to stop someone raping me.

I remember thinking that even though I was at the center of this hypothetical situation, I might as well have not been in the room. I had become an object, a pin-up girl at the center of a male heroism fantasy. The discussion of my rape continued without me.

I've thought about that radio debate over the years. It has made me wonder whether people in peace and justice movements need to begin re-evaluating our attitudes toward, and rhetoric regarding, victims of oppression.

I am as guilty as the next person of emphasizing violence against women and children more than I do violence against men in my work with Christian Peacemaker



**"Often women do most of the work—the calling, the organizing, the clean up—while a representative of the male minority serves as spokesperson."**

Teams, because I know that attacks against women and children provoke more outrage than attacks against men. Women and children are not likely to be armed and are often physically weaker than their attackers, and I take seriously the biblical injunctions to protect women, children and other marginalized members of society. However, I think we need to consider the effect that these biases have on both women and men.

In Hebron, where I spent most of my time during my stint with CPT, young men are the people most likely to be killed, injured or harassed by soldiers and settlers. I sometimes wonder what it does to young Palestinian men, or young African American men in the U.S., to know that when they are harassed, abused or treated with contempt by soldiers and police, the general public will not be as outraged as they would be if the same treatment were being directed against women.

Emphasizing violence against women while downplaying violence against men also has the effect of portraying women primarily as victims and bypassing the heroism of women living under oppression—women who practice courageous nonviolent resistance to evil.

In the 1940s when the death camps were killing millions of Jews, gypsies, communists and opponents of the Third Reich, hundreds of Gentile women with Jewish husbands converged in Berlin outside of the jail where their husbands were being held, refusing to go away until their husbands were released.



**"I do not suggest that women are innately more courageous or moral."**

During the reigns of terror in Latin America, when the militaries in various countries were kidnapping, killing and torturing anyone who expressed dissent, it was the mothers of the disappeared who steadfastly continued congregating in front of governmental offices with pictures of their family members, demanding that their governments tell them where their loved ones were.

Those who read CPTnet, an Internet news and discussion group, know that our Chiapas, Mexico, project consists largely of accompanying a pacifist Mayan Indian group,

the Bees. They also know that more than 40 of the Bees, mostly women and children, were slaughtered by paramilitaries in 1997. But most of our constituency do not know that when soldiers and paramilitaries come to invade the autonomous Zapatista communities in Chiapas, it is largely the women who form an impenetrable unarmed human shield against the heavily armed invaders.

In Hebron, I have witnessed older women fearlessly confronting soldiers who have detained their sons or who come to demolish their houses. I have witnessed the women students of Hebron University standing in the front lines of a weeks-long demonstration against the Israeli military who refused to allow classes to be held on the Hebron University campus.

In fact, as I reflect upon my last five years in Christian Peacemaker Teams, I would say that most grassroots peace and social justice movements have more women than men in their ranks. Often women do most of the work—the calling, the organizing, the clean up—while a representative of the male minority serves as spokesperson.

## Women in Ministry

**Carol and Ken Peterson** have begun pastorates at Dover (Ohio) Christian Fellowship.

**Jan Rheinheimer** was ordained as co-pastor at Mountain Community Mennonite Church, Palmer Lake, Colo.

**Elizabeth Zaes** has begun a pastorate at Mennonite Community Church, Fresno, Calif.

**June Mears Driedger** was ordained as pastoral team member at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

**Rosie Epp** has been named pastor at Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church, Sioux Falls, S.D.

**Mary and Phil Minninger** have been named co-pastors at Paoli (Ind.) Mennonite Fellowship.

**Bev Cook** has been named associate pastor at Prince of Peace Mennonite Church, Corvallis, Ore.

**LaVerle Schrag** has been named associate pastor at First Mennonite Church, Hutchinson, Kan.

Particularly within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I have found a preponderance of women involved in the hard work of relating to the enemy. While men may do top-level negotiating, women seem to be better able to transcend ethnic and national identities and empathize with all mothers who fear for their children's safety, who are facing impending homelessness, who are frustrated by the attention that so many people pay to rhetoric, while homes keep going down, bombs keep exploding and family members remain in jail for political reasons.

I do not suggest that women are innately more courageous or moral. I also realize that both men and women, in some instances, face struggles that the other gender does not. In the United States, for example, women do not have to register for the draft, and in most countries, it is easier for them to avoid conscription. Women are at a far greater risk of rape during times of both war and times of peace.

However, I do suggest that those who care about peace and justice look beyond those who receive credit for courage, to the quiet heroism and hard work of women involved in nonviolent struggles. I suggest that when we talk about violence toward women and children, we also acknowledge that many women are not passive objects of oppression and violence, and that men are sometimes targets for official persecution. Women are in the trenches of most conflicts around the world. In great numbers they resist victimization of both men and women and deserve to have their stories told and heroism honored.

**Kathleen** has worked with Christian Peacemaker Teams for five years, serving on assignments in Haiti; Washington, D.C.; Hebron; West Bank; and Chiapas, Mexico. She writes curriculum for Herald Press and is the author of two books: *When it Hurts to Live* (Faith and Life, 1994) and *We Are the Pharisees* (Herald Press, 1995).

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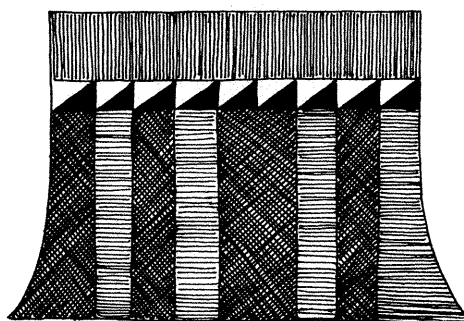
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## News and Verbs

Carol Ann Weaver will be in Durban, South Africa, in 2000 serving as "Visiting Professor of Music" at University of Natal. This is a sabbatical leave from her teaching position at Conrad Grebel College, University of Waterloo. She will be researching women in music and *mbaqanga* music in particular.

A new book, *Victim to Survivor: Women Recovering from Clergy Sexual Abuse*, edited by Nancy Poling, is available from Pilgrim Press (\$15.95). The book consists of six stories of women who were abused by clergy. Marie Fortune has written the foreword.



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